2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
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death and murder first appeared in the world. The couple who remained did not know what to do with the dead body. They carried the corpse on their shoulders for three days, lamenting and crying, but could not get rid of it. At last, God caused the earth to open, and they placed the body inside. Thus the practice of burial and of the three days' mourning for the dead began.[1] The couple now stayed together and begot a ~~male~~ child, who became the ancestor of the Nupe people.'

If, then, Nupe mythology is a very inadequate guide to dogma and doctrine, this inadequacy is itself significant, revealing the Nupe attitude towards their creed and indeed the whole tenor of their religious thought in their true perspective. Mythology, as we have said, illustrates and exemplifies rather than enunciates the creed. We may go further and say that it expresses the creed in a form less abstract and theoretical than does formulated doctrine. For myths borrow the phraseology of realistic accounts, dealing as they do with near-humans and near-natural events; thus they make less demand upon sheer credence, compromise with ordinary imagination, and as it were vulgarize the dogma. If, then, primitive religions rely on mythical narratives rather than on dogmatic assertions they seem to discard the more abstract contents of religious thought. Yet Nupe religion, which does not employ mythology either to any great extent, is clearly not of this kind. If the Nupe do not attempt a specific, coherent formulation of their creed, neither do they seek to re-phrase it in more concrete and would-be realistic language. In other words, Nupe religion forgoes the means of 'vulgarizing' the dogma. Thus, though its creed may be inarticulate, yet it is held in all abstractness.

3. CATEGORIES

(i) *God and the World*

The most basic concept of Nupe theology, that of the supreme being, is also the widest. In a sense it stands for the whole realm of religion, serving to separate all things that belong to that realm from others that do not. For in order to express this distinction the Nupe say of an object, phenomenon, or type of action that it is, or is not, *nyá Sokó*—'of God' or 'belonging to God'. There are two inaccuracies in this broad category of things religious. The clause 'of God' in the sense here understood is properly applied only in the context of discussions turning upon the dichotomy of the religious and profane. In a wider context the phrase loses its disjunctive implication; for ultimately everything is 'of God', that

[1] There is no such rule of 'three days' mourning'.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
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is, is his creation. But the relationship between God and the created world is once more viewed as a dichotomy. And in this final context only the forms of religious action which bear on the living, active powers of the deity are 'of God', while all others, having become part of his completed creation, are classed with the 'things in the world'.

We shall later exemplify this somewhat sophisticated point in Nupe theology. As regards the dualism of God and the World, it is aligned with yet another, of more concrete character, of the sky and the earth. Together, these four concepts describe the Nupe universe; for it contains no other cosmic entities, for example, no underworld or some yonder inhabited by the spirits of the dead; nor have the Nupe anything to say about the stars, the sun, or the moon. In all relevant respects the created world (*yiže*) is identical with the earth (*kin*); while the Creator is identified with the sky. Though the supreme being is also addressed or referred to as *tsóci*, 'Our Lord',[1] his proper name is *Sokó*, which is best translated as God-the-Sky, the same word also denoting the sky in the visible, physical sense.[2]

As God is identified with the sky, so he is also said to dwell in the sky. But this belief is vague and contradicted by other statements, as are most assertions on the nature of the supreme deity. In fact, nothing very definite can be said or is known about God. He is not on earth, and the most common and most strongly emphasized comment on the nature of the deity is *Sokó lokpá*, 'God is far away'. Yet in a different, more mystic sense he is present, always and everywhere; thus in a song I recorded it is said—

God is in front,
He is in the back.

God has clearly awareness, intellect, and some of the sensitiveness of man; for he is addressed and appealed to in everyday language. But he is hidden and cannot be seen; nor is he personified more concretely; indeed, no one knows if he is or is not like man.[3]

[1] The suffix *-ci* means 'our'; the word *tsó* occurs normally as a suffix of other words, denoting 'owner of' or 'master of', e.g. *kin-tsó*, Owner of the Land, *emi-tsó*, Family Head.

[2] There exists another word for 'sky', *sama*, which is of Hausa-Arabic origin and is used, at least today, when referring to the sky and firmament in the material sense, e.g. 'the sky is black', 'the sky is clear', etc. The word *Sokó*, incidentally, also indicates something big or great, the suffix *-kó* having that implication.

[3] Strictly speaking, therefore, there is no justification for calling the supreme deity 'he'. In Nupe language this issue does not arise since the personal pronouns have no gender and do not distinguish between animate and inanimate objects. For purely practical reasons, however, I shall continue to employ the personal pronoun in the masculine.

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779 776 Characteristically, any thought of gaining more precise knowledge of the deity is regarded as absurd and may well be ridiculed, as in this somewhat slangy proverb: 'The thing that conceals God, go and buy it.'

Only these facts are positively and universally known and are often argued when the Nupe wish to compare their beliefs with those of other peoples: God is all-powerful, as he is all-knowing; there is only one God, and no other deities exist; God was in the beginning, before the appearance of man and the creation of nature, being himself the creator of all things. And here we must note that the phrase 'all things' is meant to include things good as well as evil, which article of creed appears, circuitously phrased, in various secular songs. Thus one song contains this phrase—'A being which God did not create, neither did the world create it'; and another runs thus—'Should you do anything that is beautiful, God has caused it to be beautiful; should you do anything evil, God has caused it to be evil.'

The Nupe deity, then, is something like the *causa causans* of mediæval philosophy, though the crucial problem of that philosophy, how to reconcile an omnipotent deity with the presence of evil in the world, is not really seen as a problem. Good and evil are both laid into the same creation, as are the various sources of evil —malevolent spirits, disease, witchcraft. Without further speculations about a Free Will, or the weakness of mind and matter, or Satan, the deficiencies of the world are taken for granted. The only problem in Nupe theology is the actual power of evil, not its origin. And this power is justified, once more without moral speculations, by accepting, simply, the aloofness of the deity. In other words, one does not wonder why God did not create a better world; but one attempts to answer the question—Why does God not better protect man, who has to live in this world? The answer, as we shall see, is that divine concern with the world is limited.

Here a slight correction is necessary. The Nupe do mention Satan or the Devil; but they only just mention him and no more. He is called *Abilí* or *Jibillu*, and sometimes *Sheitán*. The last name is, of course, Arabic and a loan-word in Nupe. So is *Jibillu*, which is the Nupe version of the Arabic *Jibríl*, an angel of the Qoran having been changed into an African Devil. Whether *Abilí* is an original word or a further corruption of *Jibríl*, it is difficult to say; the Nupe use of the word in ordinary conversation seems to suggest the former. It is commonly employed to denote some unexpected evil turn of events, for example, a quarrel between friends or the discovery that an otherwise truthful person has been guilty of a lie. On occasions like these the people would exclaim—'Ah, the devil is at work' or, literally, '*Abilí* is present'. But though the

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Nupe firmly hold that the devil exists, that he is behind many (though not all) evil things, and that there is only one devil (while there are many evil spirits), their knowledge of Satan carries no further; nor does he play any part in religious observances. Only diviners might refer to *Sheitán* or *Abilí* in connection with a particularly sinister prophecy. Above all, the Nupe hold that God has created the devil, so that Satan, far from being a counterpart of the deity, is only one of his ambiguous creatures.

There is no doubt in the minds of the Nupe that God, as he created the world, so he can also control it and intervene in its course. Everyday speech is full of phrases such as 'with God's help', 'may God give this or that', or 'may God cause such-and-such to happen'. To describe, incidentally, this divine intervention one uses the ordinary causative mode and the same verbs that are applied to human actions. One also swears by God and lends weight to any assertion by adding *be Sokó nyi*—'by God'. But these allusions imply little certainty that God will in fact intervene; for 'God is far', aloof, outside the world; which tenet overrules all other notions.

This belief has an important consequence: one cannot approach God directly. Although every ritual act is accompanied by some phrase or blessing invoking *Sokó*, there are no prayers specifically addressed to God and capable of being employed freely and independently of the appointed ceremonial occasions. Rather, the approach to the deity is circuitous, that is, through the given ceremonials or rituals. If we call the belief in God-the-Creator the first article of the Nupe creed, the second would be this conception of ritual as an intermediary between God and man.

(ii) *Ritual Force*

The condition that God is approached implicitly in every ceremonial and solely in this manner is regarded, not as fortuitous, but as having been willed by God and embodied in his creation. Equally, it is regarded as peculiar to the Nupe form of worship. To quote a typical comment: The Mohammedans can pray to God directly; but *Sokó* is 'so very far from men' that he gave them the ritual as an intermediary—a 'thing-in-between'. The ritual is thus a gift of God or 'of God'—*nyá Sokó*; but being an intermediary, the ritual is also of this world. Now, the Nupe will readily quote an inventory of the world, thus: 'In the world there are these things—*zawangíži*, human beings; *ena gontáži*, animals; *aljenúži*, spirits; and *kuti*, ritual.' With one exception, this list fully accounts for the Nupe picture of creation, though the nature of animate beings is itself composite and requires a further list of attributes. For the moment we are concerned only with the last item on the list and

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absorb the appeals to ancestors. This is only another aspect of their lack of a special 'domain'. And even where *kuci* worship does not lose its independence so completely, it yet has little autonomy; for the kind of supernatural aid it promises can equally be procured by other forms of worship or sacrifice. But of this, too, we shall speak later.

Let me conclude the present account with the brief mention of a further ambiguous practice, a form of sacrifice which stands halfway between an appeal to *Sokó* and the appeal to *kuci*. It is performed by families in which there are or have been twins and is known by that name, *bakomba*. Such houses will possess a special shrine, consisting of a number of small earthenware pots built into the outside wall of a hut, which the women will regularly fill with beer and porridge. Once a year, on the birthday of the twins, the family head will bring a sacrifice of beer and blood of fowl. Now, twins are lucky and a sign of divine benevolence; equally, they represent a special incarnation, a concentration as it were of the 'kinship soul'. In this sacrifice, then, one addresses *Sokó* as well as (an anonymous) *kuci*; and the people who have such a twin shrine will perform all their sacrifices to *kuci* there, and not over the grave of an individual ancestor.

(v) *Spirit Beings*

In the preceding discussion we touched upon certain beliefs in spirits—in 'ancestral spirits', which are an aspect of the personal soul, and in 'ghosts', which are transmutations of the shadow soul. But when the Nupe mention 'spirits' among the things that make up the world they do not mean either of these; they mean immaterial beings which exist in their own right and are not derived from humans, although they have some quasi-human attributes and inhabit the same earth. It is possible that this belief is not an original tenet of Nupe creed; for the Nupe call these spirit beings by a Hausa–Arabic name, *aljénu* (pl. *aljenúži*), and may well have borrowed certain of their aspects from Islam. However this may be, the Nupe do not regard this belief as in any way alien or 'borrowed'. And whether the name for spirits is Nupe or Arabic, it is a name, sharply distinguishing this class of beings from all others.

Though circumstantial and readily expressed, the spirit beliefs are fluid and far from uniform. The most varied opinions will not be thought unorthodox, but will be taken as evidence for the multifariousness of the spirit world. A first group of spirits, vaguely anthropomorphous but without distinct individualities, is said to inhabit the inanimate parts of nature, hills, trees, watercourses, the bush, and so forth. These spirits have sex, and according to

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
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some informants the female variety lives in the water while the males prefer the land. The sex of the spirits does not influence their character, which may be either friendly or hostile. The people know where 'good' spirits dwell as well as the places haunted by 'evil ones', and may perform sacrifices to keep their friendship or to ward off their malevolence. Small gifts to the spirits (called *efu*), consisting of a little food, honey, a few kolanuts or cowrie shells, are often left on the roadside, placed beside a spring, or dropped in the river. The behaviour of the good spirits is nondescript and consists in not doing evil or mischief rather than in doing anything positively beneficial. The hostile spirits act erratically and unpredictably, their actions ranging from meaningless pranks (such as throwing stones or making frightening noises) to the infliction of serious harm (causing lunacy or fever, or making pregnant women bear a deformed child). Any locality showing unusual or unnatural features, such as an unexpected clearing in the bush or a grassless patch in a meadow, is likely to be the dwelling place of a spirit; so is any uncommonly large tree in the bush. A woodcutter who is unable to fell a tree, a fisherman who loses his nets in the river for no apparent reason, would equally suspect the presence of an *aljénu*. At midnight, when there is 'no noise and sound', the spirits are likely to be abroad. But on the whole one pays little attention to these 'nature spirits', which can easily be foiled by simply avoiding the haunted locality and against which sacrifices are ample protection.

Only in the Niger valley have I recorded nature spirits ascribed more momentous power as well as names and individualities and worshipped in proper, full-scale rituals. We shall in due course speak of two of them, the spirit *Ketsá*, inhabiting the steep rock of that name which rises in mid-stream near Jebba Island, and the spirit suggestively called *Nddáduma*, 'Father Niger'.

A second group of spirits is vaguely associated with animals. I recorded only two isolated instances of fully-fledged beliefs in animal spirits. The first concerns a spirit called *Bukpe* which lives, in the shape of a crocodile, in a stream near Mokwa. It is supposed to be a male spirit, 'black' or evil, causing disease and drought. Yet its malevolence can be controlled by means of an annual ritual, known by the same name, and by means of a pact concluded between the people of Mokwa and the crocodile spirit. It is part of the pact that the people of Mokwa must never kill or annoy this or any other crocodile, while they in turn will not be harmed by any member of the species. This belief, however, is not willingly put to a test; when I visited *Bukpe* in his lair, my Nupe companions were very careful not to come too close. Some time after my visit the crocodile in fact killed a child; whereupon the people

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of Mokwa, true to the fiction of the 'pact', held a formal court, trying the animal for breaking the pact and passing sentence of death.[1] The power of Mokwa over crocodiles is well known all over Nupe country and, today at least, unrivalled. The village of Katcha, on a tributary of the Niger, apparently had a 'sacred crocodile' in the past; but the charm had failed to work and, less faithful to their cult (or less optimistic) than the people of Mokwa, the people of Katcha abandoned the practice.

My second instance comes from Pichi, a small village near Bida, and concerns a spirit said to be embodied in the leopards of that locality. Surprisingly, it is identified with one of the early chiefs of Pichi, many generations back, and known by his name, *Ndakó Yisa*, Grandfather Yisa; but since all Nupe invariably refer to leopards in this circuitous and respectful manner, and since Yisa is an extremely common name, I am inclined to regard this quasi-totemic interpretation as apocryphal. Nor is the belief very positively stated or accompanied by special rituals. The people believe, however, that no leopard will attack a person of Pichi, and in turn refrain from molesting the animal, even if it kills their dogs or goats.

If animals ever played a more momentous role in the Nupe universe, there is little evidence of it today. Some disconnected 'superstitions' and a few suggestions in folklore are the only instances of this kind. Thus the Nupe believe that animals, like men, have 'spirit doubles' (of which more presently) and that certain animals are also possessed of quasi-human or superhuman faculties. The attitude towards leopards is a case in point. Most villagers are convinced that if the respectful, indirect reference to 'Grandfather Yisa' were omitted, the leopards in the neighbourhood would be annoyed by this 'lack of courtesy' and would surely attack the village (though strict observance of the rule would not make them more amenable or friendly); but no attempt is made to explain the belief or to relate it to some other, more fundamental, tenet of the creed. Much the same applies to 'Father Tortoise', *Ndakpa*, who is the hero of numerous tales, in which he plays the part of a would-be clever fellow who runs into various adventures, either amusing or containing a moral. A small red beetle which appears at the beginning of the rains is called *Sokó*, which odd nomenclature elicits only this comment: 'Since the

[1] The people told me afterwards that the crocodile had in fact died; when I pointed out that I had since seen it in the stream, I was assured that it was 'a different one'. The people of Jebba Island, incidentally, claimed that the river ritual *ketsá* similarly protected all riverain people from crocodiles; which claim was ridiculed by the proud owners of the crocodile cult in Mokwa, who at once recalled that three years previously a Kede man from the river had been killed by a crocodile.

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND CULTS

General

771 The majority of the Nupe are now Moslems and there is at least one small
162 mosque in every village. The 1931 Census gave 235,990 Moslems out of a total of 324,375 for all religions.[1] But in many communities pagan ritual exists side by side with some Moslem observances, the latter being increasingly adopted for reasons of prestige.

Among the pagans there is common belief in a sky god *Sokó*, who is believed to have created the world and then withdrawn himself from communion with man. The Nupe concept of the cosmos is, according to Nadel, fundamentally amoral. God, having created the world, gave men access to certain mystical forces, making them at the same time subject to these and leaving them to make such use of these "powers" and of the material world as they would and could. First among these mystical forces is *kuti*, the compelling power of ritual, believed to be harnessed in varying degrees in a multiplicity of rites belonging to persons, communities, and associations, and conferring both special benefits or protection and increasing general well-being. At the same time, invocation of the ancestors of kinsfolk, of the people at large, and of the ancient rulers, can afford some measure of benefit or protection. This can also be gained through a separate use of "medicines" which are believed variously to combine pseudo-therapeutic and magical properties. Finally, the evil power of witchcraft, which God also put into the world, has to be discovered, punished, and driven out by special rites. Since, moreover, there are these alternatives with reference to both good fortune and bad, divination has a great part to play in determining the rites to be performed in particular situations.[2]

Spirits

● 776 The Nupe believe that immaterial beings, existing in their own right and with some human attributes, live in the bush or in hills, trees, watercourses, and other natural features. Their Hausa-Arabic name (*aljenúši*, sing. *aljénu*) suggests that some aspects of this belief may be borrowed from Islam. The spirits may be male or female, friendly or hostile, though only two—*Nddduma* (Father Niger) and *Ketsá* (associated with a rock in midstream near Jebba Island)—are thought to possess any considerable powers.[3] Another group of spirits is vaguely associated with animals. The least clearly conceived are personal spirits or spirit doubles, which belong to every individual from birth to death and cannot be changed. These may be good or bad.[4]

769 Spirits of the dead (*kuci*) may be reincarnated in their own descendants.
776 Approach to the Supreme Being can be made through ancestral spirits. Special sacrifices are performed either in the house or on the grave of a particular ancestor and the *kuci* are invariably invoked in the ceremonials surrounding birth, marriage, and death. Otherwise it seems that ancestral sacrifices are performed only sporadically and for a specific reason, such as illness in the family.[5]

776 Tsoede, who is regarded by all Nupe as their common ancestor, is venerated in an elaborate cycle of myths and rituals surrounding sacred objects—chains and bronze figures—connected with him.[6] He is, however, outside the general framework of Nupe religious beliefs.

[1] Census of Nigeria, vol. II, p. 63. Unfortunately there are no later figures available for comparison.
[2] See below, pp. 47–8.
[3] See below.
[4] Nadel, 1954a, pp. 26–31.
[5] Ibid., pp. 23–5.
[6] Ibid., pp. 31–2.

sons, his whole brothers, and his daughters in a fixed and decreasing proportion. If the children are infants the money is held in trust for them by the brothers of the deceased. A woman's money is inherited in the same way, but either sex may leave their money as they choose, by declaring their wishes in the presence of a large number of responsible witnesses. If there is no family, a woman may inherit from her husband, and in some cases where there are no children, and she is known to have been a specially good wife, the brothers of the deceased forego their right in her favour. If she has no children her property goes to her husband. In no case does an illegitimate child inherit.

In old times the people did not dare live outside walled villages, but the neighbouring lands were apportioned by the village-head amongst the various heads of families, according to the amount he and his could beneficially occupy. The family-head in his turn granted the right of occupancy to individuals of his family, and, as no tree was of value before the virgin forest was cleared, each occupant had also the right to the sylvan produce of his land. As, however, virgin forest diminished and land became less plentiful, the heads reserved the use of the oil-palm to themselves, though at one time they held it in trust for the Emir.

Land cannot be sold, but it may be redistributed either on the migration of the holder, or on the extinction of the whole family. The village-head has a right to ask the family-head to give him back some land that he may grant it to a new comer, always supposing that this land is not at the time fully occupied. The right of occupancy passes on the death of the holder to the successive head of the family.

Amongst the pagan Nupe* the guardian spirit "Gunu" is worshipped. Sheep, dogs and fowls are sacrificed in his honour, their blood being poured out as a libation to him, whilst their flesh is consumed by the worshippers. Every eleven months the men go to his altar, beneath which sacred relics have been buried since time immemorial, where they kneel down in a wide circle, joining hands, and bowing their foreheads to the ground. The Elders address the spirit, and a feast and special dance follows. Other festivals are held at harvest time, and on the appointment of a new head-man, each village head-man being also village priest. There is a semi-religious institution called "Ndakogboiya." A meeting is held at the Chief's house, when a man may complain of his wife's conduct and beg that she may be taken to task, together with any other ill-doer. A man then mounts on stilts, and appears amongst the people after dark, proclaiming their evil deeds, and receiving propitiatory

* Sapke and Mokwa.

4: Temple G-4 (no date) 1922

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In this world they[1] sacrifice to a god called Dako-Gwoya, 634
who takes visible form after harvest, when a big feast is held 771
and much beer is drunk. He has the appearance of a man, but 776
is higher than a double-storeyed house. He speaks and tells the people what to do in business and social matters, but though the women may hear him they may not see him.

The Nupe of Zumbufu (on the Niger) are of mixed blood, 634
having intermarried freely with the Yoruba. Zumbufu was 776
founded by a hunter early in the nineteenth century, who came from the Lafiaji District, but they were never tributary to any but the Bini of Bida. They were incorporated in the Share District of Ilorin Province in 1910. They too are pagans and worship a god called Bakoboya, who is recognised as far away as Padda in the Pategi Division, an evil spirit who brings sickness and famine. He appears in visible forms at festivals, in the guise (with the aid of a ten foot pole) of a very tall man. His representative dances round the town, surrounded by the head-men of Zumbufu, and throughout the dance they beat each other violently, but are said to feel no pain.

The inhabitants of Kutegi, Enegi, and Gbachi, are immigrants 634
from Bornu. They still wear the Kanuri tribal marks, but they 304
have adopted the Nupe language. 197
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[1] [i.e. The Kusopa subtribe.--Analyst]